

Remembering Battle of Stirling Bridge

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To those who have seen the film "Braveheart" with Mel Gibson, you will know exactly what happened at Stirling Bridge Sept. 11, 1297. In order to commemorate the 700th anniversary of this famous Scottish victory headed by William Wallace, Stirling has a range of events between now and October. The highlight will be a re-enactment of the battle Sept. 12 - 13.

Background

This violent and sad tale came about because of the division amongst Scottish royalty since 1286 and a bitter family dispute over who should be king. Seeing his opportunity, the English king, Edward I (1272-1307), seized upon the confusion to march into Scotland. After brutal massacres, Edward brought the Scottish noblemen to their knees.

He sent English officials to run the government and to hold all positions of authority. This obviously caused great resentment, but still the noblemen of Scotland continued to squabble.

Meanwhile, Sir William Wallace was making a name for himself as a warring rebel trying to unite Scotland so that it would be a free land and out of the control of its English neighbours.

Gathering an army

During this time, Wallace was gathering his army and had managed to rally the local men into a small fighting unit. When word of the revolt spread, Wallace's army quickly grew by the hundreds and then by the thousands. One by one, he marched upon and captured the English strongholds in Scotland, always with fatal results to their English defenders. The biggest battle of all was the Battle of Stirling Bridge.

In battle, Wallace killed the Sheriff of Lanark, Treasurer Cressingham, and celebrated his victory by cutting the flesh of the victim into pieces and handing them out as a symbolic gesture. Wallace



Courtesy photo

This is the view of Stirling from the Wallace Monument. It is also the site of the Battle of Stirling.

made a belt out of his piece of flesh.

Defeat

In 1298, having had enough, Edward made his way to Scotland with a powerful army to defeat Wallace, and this he did in the town of Falkirk. Enter here Robert the Bruce. After standing next to Wallace and proclaiming to the people that he, as royalty, would stand with them in battle to fight for his country, he changed his mind. He decided that the odds were with the English and so joined their ranks instead.

After defeat, Wallace went overseas to try to gain support for his cause. In 1304, a new Scottish king was appointed and clemency granted to many of Wallace's supporters in the uprising. No such clemency was granted to Wallace and a bounty was placed on his head. He was finally captured on his return to Glasgow in 1305, having been betrayed by a fellow Scotsman, Ralph Rae, a prisoner of war the English had released on condition that he lead them to Wallace.

Trial of William Wallace

Wallace was taken to London for trial. He was given no legal rights or privileges, and was sentenced to death. He was hung by the neck, his head was cut off and his body was cut into quarters. Wallace's head was displayed on London Bridge and the four quarters of his body taken to Newcastle, Berwick, Perth and Stirling for display.

Anniversary events

From April - December - Scotland's Liberator is a major exhibition of the 700th anniversary and examines the life

of William Wallace and what his name has meant since his death. This is held from April through December at the Smith Art Gallery and Museum, Dumbarton Road, Stirling. Admission is free. It is open from 10:30 a.m. - 5 p.m. Tuesdays - Saturdays and from 2 - 5 p.m. Sundays. For more information, call (01786) 471917.

The Battle of Stirling Bridge at Stirling Castle Esplanade is Sept. 12 - 13. Tickets are £7. For more information, call (01786) 473544.

In addition, there are Highland Games July 13, a Braveheart Convention Sept. 12 - 14, a European Heritage Day Sept. 14, Tales of the Battle of Stirling Bridge Sept. 1 - October 31, and folk events and concerts. For more information, call the information hotline at (01786) 401297.

Location

Stirling is located in the middle of Scotland. Edinburgh is in the southeast and Glasgow is in the southwest.

Can you help find an exhibit?

The Smith Museum in Stirling is currently scouring America to locate a gold decorated box made from the "Wallace Oak" at Torwood. The casket was given to the Earl of Buchan, who in turn gifted it to George Washington to be passed to "the American most deserving it" on his death. The box went missing a couple of hundred years ago in a stagecoach holdup between New York and Philadelphia in 1803, but it is believed it still exists. If you have information, call the Smith Museum at (01786) 471917.



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